








PEOPLE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

	A king	A king ruled large areas of land. To protect his land from invasion, the king gave parts of it to local lords, who were called vassals. In return, his vassals promised to fight to defend the king's land.
	Vassal (or Lord)	Vassals or lords ruled lands granted to them by their king. Those lands were called fiefs. Within a fief, a vassal acted as a local lord and could give portions of it to vassals of his own. Someone might be the vassal of one person, but the lord of another.
	Knight	Knights were warriors who fought on horseback. In return for land, they pledged themselves as vassals to the king. Only the sons of lords could become knights. Kings, local lords, and knights were all part of a ruling class that called itself noblemen.
	Noblewomen	Noblewomen were the wives and daughters of noblemen. They were in charge of the household servants, the upbringing of children and taking care of the sick and the poor. In certain cases, noblewomen could inherit land from their parents or from their husbands. When a nobleman was away, his wife ruled the manor.
	Servants	Servants were peasants who worked in the lord's manor house, doing the cooking, cleaning, laundering, and other household chores.
	Merchants	Merchants set up businesses in the towns that began to grow in the later Middle Ages. As trade grew, a new class of highly skilled crafts- people developed. These artisans produced cloth, shoes, beer, glass and other goods that required more expertise than was available on many manor farms. Traveling merchants brought much-desired items to small towns and villages far from the major trade routes.
	Serfs	Serfs were peasants who lived in small communities called manors that were ruled by a local lord or vassal. Serfs did all the work on the manor farm: they worked the fields, cared for the livestock, built and maintained the buildings, made the clothing, and cut firewood. Men, women, and children worked side by side. Serfs had only small plots of land they could work for themselves for food.